ARC 213
June 10, 1920

THE WORK OF

THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE INFORMATION SERVICE

OF THE

AMERICAN RED CROSS

"To interpret America to the Alien and the Alien to America"

BUREAU OF
FOREIGN LANGUAGE INFORMATION SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF CIVILIAN RELIEF

National Headquarters
Washington, D. C.

1107 Broadway, New York City
Telephone Watkins 7700

II

ORIGIN AND PRESENT STATUS

This Service was first organized during The World War early in 1918, by the United States Committee on Public Information, with the object of furnishing information to the foreign speaking people in this country on the purpose of America in the war and the part that aliens were expected to play in the crisis.

The demand of the foreign language groups for information, and the need for government contacts did not cease with the signing of the Armistice. On the contrary, a situation had been created that made the Service an apparent necessity. When the Committee on Public Information, therefore, was dissolved on May 1, 1919, this Division was continued under a special emergency fund given by the Carnegie Corporation until the first of August, when it went under the joint management of the War Camp Community Service, and Community Service, Incorporated.

On December 6, 1919, this connection was terminated, and the Service was continued largely through volunteer effort with practically no finances—the foreign speaking groups feeling keenly that the work should go on, and the personnel of the Service making personal sacrifices to hold it.

This situation continued for two months until February 1, 1920, when the entire organization was taken over by the American Red Cross and became a National Bureau in the Department of Civilian Relief under the name of the Bureau of Foreign Language Information Service.

III

ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL

The headquarters of the Bureau are at 1107 Broadway, New York City, with a Washington representative at National Headquarters of the American Red Cross.

In the New York office, there is an Executive Section officered by the director and three associate directors.

In addition to the Executive Section, the Bureau consists of fifteen Foreign Language Sections covering eighteen foreign language groups,

each with a manager who speaks the language of his group and has an intimate knowledge of the conditions and aspirations of his own racial group in this country; the American Press Section; and the Research and Reference Section.

The Foreign Language Sections are Czechoslovak (Czechs and Slovaks), German, Hungarian, Italian, Jewish, Jugoslav (Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian), Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Ukrainian. The managers are American citizens, though most of them are foreign born. Each has demonstrated his exceptional qualifications for carrying on this work.

One of the associate directors acts as the manager of the America Press Section. The work of this Section consists in giving to the native-born authentic information on the foreign speaking groups in America, their problems and the conditions affecting them.

Another Section is the Research and Reference Section which gathers and catalogues, for use by the Foreign Language Sections, all governmental, state and municipal laws, and other data affecting the alien.

The representative in Washington, in cooperation with the director and associate directors, maintains contacts with all government departments, furnishing material to them and getting material from them on all topics pertinent to the needs of foreign groups and adjusting, with the various departments and bureaus, individual problems.

IV

HOW THE SERVICE WORKS

In the work of this Service in informing the alien and educating the native-born concerning him, government departments, the foreign language press, foreign language organizations, the native press, and American agencies working for the foreigner are all utilized.

Besides the work through these agencies a very large amount of individual service, averaging over 4,000 calls a month, is rendered through correspondence and personal contact.

Lecture service in several foreign languages has also been instituted, and pamphlets published because of the demand from foreign language groups for information on specific subjects.

The work of these several agencies will be taken up seriatim.

(*a*) *Cooperation with Government Departments*

Fifty-eight government departments and bureaus send daily releases to the Foreign Language Sections. In addition, the Washington representative obtains for these Sections all reports, bulletins and special data not generally sent to the mailing lists. On the other hand, she takes back to the government departments reports on the use of their material; explains the particular needs of the several foreign language groups and arranges for the production of literature which will give the governmental information desired by them.

When necessary, she takes up individual cases for direct settlement with the department concerned.

The Foreign Language Information Service maintains particularly extensive cooperation with the United States Bureau of War Risk Insurance, the United States Public Health Service, the United States Bureau of Internal Revenue, and the Government Departments of Labor and Agriculture.

Through the Foreign Language Service a "question box," or health column, is carried in the foreign language papers, at the request of the Surgeon General's Office of the United States Public Health Service, and another column has been arranged for, for the United States Bureau of War Risk Insurance.

The Surgeon General's Office prepares, also, a special weekly article for the foreign language press, released through the foreign language Sections of the Bureau.

An instance of the kind of assistance rendered the Government is the work for the United States Bureau of Internal Revenue. During four months of 1919 the Bureau of Foreign Language Information Service issued 172 internal revenue releases which gave full information on the income tax as applicable to aliens and which were printed in 850 foreign language papers; 16 circular letters on the income tax were sent to 4,500 of the largest foreign language societies, and the managers of the Foreign Language Sections explained the Income Tax Law at 127 meetings of their groups in various cities and foreign language centers.

The revision of certain Treasury decisions and forms for determining status of aliens and for refund applications has been brought about through the representations of this Bureau to the United States Bureau of Internal Revenue of the effect upon aliens of those in use. Affidavits, also, have been obtained from consuls or other acceptable agents which

have certified to the exact status of the income tax situation in various foreign countries, thus clearing up, in turn, the status of aliens from these countries in the United States, in respect to the situation here.

Regarding the work of the Bureau in this line the Commissioner of Internal Revenue has said: *"The splendid cooperation of your Service in disseminating tax information among aliens and other taxpayers who are not easily reached through regular news channels has been most helpful. This is particularly true of the series of articles prepared for the purpose of instructing foreigners regarding the payment of their income taxes before securing passports to leave the country."*

The Bureau of Public Health Service, the Savings Division of the War Loan Organization and the Bureau of War Risk Insurance—all Bureaus of the Treasury Department—have all testified, in correspondence, in most unqualified terms of the helpfulness of this Bureau in carrying their special messages to the foreigner.

From the Department of Labor, also, have come most appreciative letters of the part that the Bureau has taken in disseminating helpful information.

Much of the work of the Department of Labor is exclusively with aliens through the United States Bureau of Immigration and the United States Bureau of Naturalization, and the Department has specifically recognized the value of the Bureau of Foreign Language Information Service in the following extract from a letter of March 30, 1920:

> It is vitally important that there be organizations such as yours which can give to our citizens, in the making, information which is, as yet, not available to them because of their unfamiliarity with the language.

(*b*) *Cooperation with the Foreign Language Press*

The largest single factor that is utilized in bringing this and other official information to the foreign born is the foreign language press. The Bureau of Foreign Language Information Service sends information daily from 58 government departments and bureaus to 850 foreign language papers of the 18 foreign language groups. An average of 515 articles giving such information has been released each month for the last six months.

According to the source of material thus used, the Department of Agriculture, the United States Public Health Service, the United

States Bureau of War Risk Insurance and the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor hold the lead with 117 articles each; the Department of Labor, the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Council of National Defense come next with 40, 51, and 87 articles respectively; the American Relief Administration has furnished 25 articles; and the Department of Commerce and the United States Shipping Board 22 and 23 articles respectively. Smaller numbers have come through the several remaining government departments.

Over three-quarters of a million words of the Foreign Language Information Service material appear each month in the 850 foreign language papers.

Seventy-five per cent of the papers of the foreign language press use 82 per cent of the releases sent them by this Service and over 60 per cent of the papers of this press use 100 per cent of the releases.

From the editors of foreign language papers have come numberless letters testifying to the value of these releases.

The editor of a Dutch weekly newspaper writes:

> What they, Dutch immigrants, need . . . is education. Now we editors may write truly patriotic articles . . . but these articles can never take the place of yours. Yours resemble a *school* where the people are trained, educated—all about America.

The publisher of a number of Jugoslav newspapers and magazines writes:

> For some time we have been receiving and making good use of the splendid news service that your Bureau is sending out through the Jugoslav Section. . . We need such an agency to make it possible for the foreign language newspapers to give effective service and cooperation to the Americanization program of the Government.

The following view of the work of the Russian Section comes from an editorial in the Russian press:

> This work can be performed only by an organization which stands outside of all political parties. All the Russians, no matter what their political views were, used the lectures and the pamphlets of the Russian Section, for they brought to them the knowledge and information necessary to every Russian immigrant.

(*c*) *Cooperation with Foreign Language Organizations*

Another most important channel which is utilized in reaching the foreign born is the Foreign Language Organization.

Cooperation has been established with 67,000 such organizations.

These are chiefly national and local benefit and insurance societies, and educational, social, musical and dramatic clubs.

They circularize their members with notices from the Bureau of Foreign Language Information Service explaining laws and government regulations and post matters of timely interest on their bulletin boards. Two releases, on an average, go each month to each organization.

(*d*) *Cooperation with the American Press*

Of no less importance than the work of informing the foreign born of his duties and responsibilities is the education of the native-born in their duty to the alien.

This is done by the Foreign Language Information Service through its American Press Section. This Section gives accurate information to the American press on the special and peculiar difficulties that confront the immigrant; on his activities and on his constructive contribution to this country, as well as on the ways in which the native-born may be helpful to the alien and to the Government in bringing about the assimilation of the many races that come to our shores.

This Section issues editorial excerpt matter from the foreign language press to over 80 American papers—furnishing monthly about 10,000 words; it sends a news clip sheet of 5,000 words to 2,100 papers semi-monthly; and makes accessible authentic data concerning our foreign born to about 9,000 other American periodicals.

It is also furnishing material to well-known writers to be used in special press and magazine articles. *The New York Evening Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *The New York World* have all published articles which have been specially prepared from matter furnished by the Information Service on the following topics: "Aliens and the Income Tax"; "Alien Efforts Towards Americanization"; "Why the Alien Leaves"; "Educating the Alien"; "Industries and the Alien"; and "Foreign Language Press in America".

(*e*) *Cooperation with American Agencies Working for the Foreign Born*

American agencies working for the foreign born have availed themselves extensively of the Foreign Language Information Service. Among these organizations are the National Security League, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, War Camp Community Service, the American Library

Association, Immigrant Publication Society, Citizenship Aid Society, Immigrant Protective League and the United Neighborhood Houses.

In many instances, the Information Service has acted as an intermediary between the organization and the foreign born group or individual.

A typical letter from the Alien Information Bureau of the Detroit Board of Commerce is as follows:

> Your bulletins have been very helpful in the past and we hope that we shall continue to receive them. Any other material which you issue besides the bulletins will be most acceptable for the reading tables and bulletin boards at this [the Hungarian] branch.

(*f*) *Work Through Pamphlets and Lectures*

As a result of many appeals from the foreign born groups for information on the subject of health, citizenship, agriculture, American history, etc., the Foreign Language Information Service has printed and circulated 92,000 pamphlets in Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Polish on the following topics: "How Americans Won Their Liberty"; "Abraham Lincoln"; "How to Take Care of Your Health"; "America in War and Peace"; "A Message to American Hungarians"; "Venereal Diseases and How to Prevent Them".

Lectures have been extensively used by the managers of the various sections in reaching their respective groups.

Perhaps the most potent means of reaching the individual needs of the alien in our midst is through the visits of the managers of the various Sections to the settlements of their people.

Through such visits, a manager reaches hundreds of people, explaining to them in their own tongue the laws and regulations which affect them, in their new environment, and bringing to them a knowledge of what the Government expects and requires of them, as well as a knowledge of the privileges and opportunities offered them.

The Jugoslav manager, in a trip made to Chicago and the vicinity, held nineteen meetings for the purpose of explaining thoroughly the income tax law, and taking up individual cases. Three hundred people, on an average, attended each meeting.

(*g*) *Individual Service*

The Bureau of Foreign Language Information Service is more useful, perhaps, in its individual service than in any other form of

work. *Four thousand two hundred* individual cases have been handled, on an average, each month for the last six months by the office.

The call for this Service has come personally or through letters and has covered every class of need, though information on the income tax, passport regulations, citizenship, health, war risk insurance and war risk allotments have made up the majority of inquiries.

The information sought varies in character among the different nationalities—the Russians asking more about passport regulations and agriculture than any other group.

Within four months, the various Sections of the Foreign Language Information Service corresponded or talked with 12,872 persons concerning income tax. Each of these persons had his claim adjusted satisfactorily, or his status made clear. Either his overpaid amount was refunded by his employer, or refund proceedings were taken up by the Bureau of Internal Revenue, at the request of the Service.

During the four months period in 1919, 4,197 income tax cases of the resident and non-resident aliens, were handled, and $203,852.45 was recovered of taxes which had been overpaid in 1918.

About 130 trips were made during the last year by the Russian, Polish, Jugoslav, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Italian and Lithuanian managers to carry on this personal service. As an instance of the work done in one visit, might be mentioned the visit of the Hungarian manager to Bridgeport, Connecticut, at the call of an Hungarian editor who was receiving more inquiries than he could handle. The editor arranged for a meeting in a public hall where the manager talked to 500 people and assisted in filling out 200 income tax blanks.

Personal letters of appeal and of appreciation run into the thousands. All of them are unmistakable in their indication of the need of such an organization as the Information Service for the foreign born.

V

SUMMARY

We Are Faced with these Facts

There are 6,000,000 people in the United States who cannot speak, read, or write English.

There are 7,000,000 more who are best reached in the medium of their own tongue.

They will learn English and become citizens only if their individual experiences square with our ideal of American fair play.

The First Step must be This

We must inform them in their native language not only of their obligations and responsibilities, but also of their rights and privileges under our Government.

The more they understand these, the greater will be their interest in becoming permanently identified with this country, in learning its language and adopting its customs.

At the same time the native-born must be fully informed concerning the 17,000,000 aliens of America, so that they may function together understandingly.

What the Foreign Language Information Service Does

The Foreign Language Information Service takes this first step in the process of assimilating the alien, and educating the native-born regarding him. It informs the alien in his own language about the Government and the laws of this country. It explains what the Government expects of him and what it offers him. It clears up his misconceptions and adjusts his difficulties.

It also keeps in close and constant touch with the large body of the American press through bulletins, clip-sheets, special stories and articles, in the effort to break down the wall of misunderstanding between the native and the foreign born.

How It Does This

The Foreign Language Information Service works through more than 850 papers of the foreign language press, 67,000 foreign language organizations, and adjusts more than 4,000 personal cases a month. It has sent out 92,000 pamphlets in Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Polish, and has stimulated lecture service in several languages.

On the other hand it furnishes 10,000 words of foreign language editorial matter to 80 American papers monthly; sends 5,000 words of general news concerning the alien to 2,100 papers, and makes accessible authentic data concerning our foreign born to about 9,000 other American periodicals.

What the Foreign Language Information Service Stands for

The Foreign Language Information Service is non-partisan and non-political, but it is not impersonal. It stands for a united country, for a "square deal", and for the truth always. It believes in "America for the Americans", but it believes that all, regardless of race, who are in sympathy with the fundamental principles upon which our nation was founded *are* Americans in the truest sense. To uphold these principles, to inculcate, and to propagate them is the primary work of this Service which strives to "Interpret America to the Alien, and the Alien to America".